

How to Live as a Christ-follower

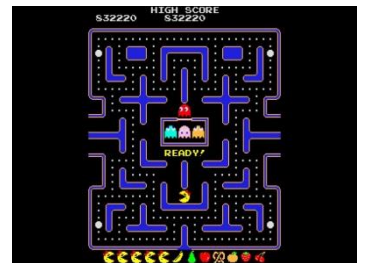
Ephesians 5:15-20
November 13, 2016

Last year Activision bought the company who made the game Candy Crush, for... can you guess for how much?

\$5.9 billion dollars!¹ Any video gamers in the crowd this morning? Whether you like the old school games like Ms. Pac Man or Space Invaders or the newer stuff like Candy Crush or Call of Duty, there's one thing they all have in common: you get multiple lives. You get a do over. If the ghost's catch Pac Man, he dies. But, no worries, you get another shot. You get more lives and you try again.



There's a reincarnation of sorts where you can try again and again, and you probably get a little farther with each try. With enough time and effort, you may eventually pass all the levels. I think I got to the banana level a few times in Ms. Pac Man. But, back in those days it took a lot of wasted lives and a lot of wasted quarters to get there. But the Christian life doesn't work like a video game. We don't get to come back to planet earth for another try. We get just one shot; one life to live. That's it. How you live this one life is completely up to you. But you can be sure of this, you won't get another shot.



This is why we should heed the caution in Ephesians 5:15-16, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." We are being urged to live wisely. Living wisely means that we need to be vigilant in watching out for unwise choices. After all, the days are evil. Or, perhaps the days really aren't all that evil? If you think about it, Paul wrote these words to the Christ-followers living in Ephesus almost 2,000 years ago. Maybe those days were evil, but that doesn't necessarily mean these days are evil for us today in Bemidji.

What do you think; are the days evil? Kind of pessimistic isn't it? Overall, life is pretty good in this world. Everybody seems to be getting along for the most part. Most of us have a place to live and food on the table. We have cars to drive around and hobbies like hunting and fishing. We've got some extra money around for Christmas shopping or going out to lunch with a friend. Life is pretty good. The world is a pretty good place.

If this becomes our perspective on life, we are missing the urgent message from our text this morning. It's a message that we need so that we will learn how we should be living as a Christ-follower. As Christians we must guard against spiritual apathy or being content with the condition of the world around us. There is evil around us. Sin is still having its way in our world. Each day it tries to do its destructive and wicked work. This results in many people who are really hurting and who are beginning to recognize their great need for God. And this creates a great need for wise-living Christ-followers.

v. 16 challenges us to make the most of every opportunity. The ESV translates v. 16 "making the best use of the time." The NKJV translates it "redeeming the time." We can't buy time. But the idea here is to buy as many opportunities as you can with the time you have. Spend your time on what matters most because time will eventually run out. We can't put a spending freeze on time or save it for a rainy day. It's already raining; the days are evil. Note that v. 16 is not a call to avoid these evil days or to fear them. Rather, we are to make the most of the opportunities available in the midst of these days.²

Ephesians 2:17 clarifies how to make the most out of our time, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Here is an incredibly important question: What is the Lord's will for

¹ See <http://fortune.com/2015/11/03/activision-blizzard-king-digital/> Activision is the company behind the video game Call of Duty. They bought the company King Digital, maker of the game Candy Crush.

² Rom. 12:21 tells us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Christ-followers? How does Jesus want us to live? First of all, we're warned not to be foolish; not to act foolishly or think foolishly. Don't pursue your own will or live according to your own understanding. But rather, understand what the Lord wants. By "understanding" V. 17 is not simply talking about "an intellectual understanding of the Lord's will" but rather how "God's gracious saving plan is to lead [us] to right conduct."³ Right understanding leads to right behavior.

God's will was clearly explained to us way back in the beginning of Ephesians 1. He chose us before the creation of the world to be adopted into His family through Jesus Christ. This was "in accordance with His pleasure and will." By God's grace, we've been forgiven of our sin and brought into His family. And it's clear from verses like Ephesians 2:10 that we were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works." Therefore, we are to live in pursuit of God's mission. We have important and urgent work to do! This is what v. 16 was telling us: make the most of every opportunity because once these evil days come to an end, our opportunities to make an impact will be over.

As we pursue God's mission with our lives, it keeps us from squandering our opportunities each day. I've squandered a few opportunities in my life. It's painful for me to recall several times when there was a door of opportunity for me to fight back against evil or to present the gospel and I just plain missed it. I was just not paying attention; not being very careful. It's so easy to get distracted by the busyness of lesser priorities and the next thing we know, the opportunity has already passed us by. Sadly, we can't get these chances back. But, moving forward, we can be more careful to watch for the next opportunity.

What's your strategy for living out your faith in evil days? Our present-day world is filled with opportunities to run hard after God and His purposes for our lost world. When we all get to heaven, there'll be plenty of time for other things. But, the one joy we will not have in heaven is making a difference in this lost world. We can't afford a "duck and cover" strategy in evil days. It would be wrong for us to just lay low until the Lord returns. We're also not supposed to expect others to do the work that God has uniquely called us to do. We must push aside any tendency to pass the buck or recruit someone else to do what is clearly the Lord's will for us. We need to understand what the Lord's will is. He is calling each and every Christ-follower to make the most of every opportunity that he or she has to pursue God's mission in the world.

Ephesians 5:18-20 goes on to say, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." It's important to understand that every Christ-follower already has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. For example, back in Ephesians 1:13-14 we learned that, "...When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance..."

But here in Ephesians 5:18, it's talking about something else. It is using a present tense verb in such a way that it indicates this verse is not talking about a one-time experience of being filled with the Spirit. Rather, it's talking about something that happens "Repeatedly, as the occasion requires, the Spirit empowers [us] for worship, service and testimony."⁴ ⁵ So, Christ-followers are intended to live being filled with the Spirit daily.

The Apostle Paul uses an interesting word picture here. He contrasts the drunkenness of being filled with wine to the influence of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, I don't know that I would have gone there; just saying. Does Paul mean that we are to get drunk on the HS? Well, no, not exactly. That's probably taking Paul's illustration a little too literally. Paul is not recommending drunken, out of control, behavior from the Spirit. Rather, he is saying that positive behaviors will result when we are being empowered moment by moment by the Spirit. He lists 5 specific results through a series of participles in vv. 19-21.⁶ Being filled with the Spirit results in:

³ O'Brien, P. T. (1999). *The letter to the Ephesians*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 385.

⁴ *NIV Study Bible 2011*, p. 1992 note on v. 18.

⁵ "The present imperative πληροῦσθε ('be filled') suggests that the Spirit's infilling is to be continual." O'Brien, P. T. (1999). *The letter to the Ephesians*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. p. 391, note #121.

⁶ See O'Brien p. 387.

- **Speaking** to one another w/ psalms, hymns, & songs from the Spirit.
- **Singing & Making music** from your heart to the Lord. (Here we have 2 participles connected by the conjunction "&.")
- **Giving thanks** to God...for everything. (We'll talk more about this one next Sunday.)
- **Submitting** to one another. (v. 21 is actually a hinge verse that leads us into the rest of chapter 5 and part of Ephesians 6. We'll dive into these verses as part of a 3-week series in the future on husbands/wives, children/parents, and servants/masters.)

For now, let's get back to Paul's word picture on drunkenness. The natural result of getting drunk is debauchery, which is reckless sinful living. The natural result (or should we say the supernatural result) of being filled with the HS includes the above 5 things. Let's take time to look at the first few in this list.

V. 19 connects speaking to one another to three kinds of music; psalms, hymns, and songs from the spirit. At first, this list seems like 3 particular types of music or genres that are acceptable for Christians. However, that's not it at all. We go in a wrong direction when we try to raise one particular style of music over and above other styles. What v. 19 is really saying is that we are blessed with a broad range of diverse music out there. Scripture is teaching us to use "every kind of appropriate song" to worship our God.⁷

Some music will be right out of our OT book of Psalms. Others will be hymns of praise from throughout history that celebrate who God is and what He has done for us. And still others will be songs and choruses prompted by the HS in our contemporary experience, even right up to this very day and hour. All kinds of styles and genres of music can be prompted "from the Spirit."⁸ Therefore, God's Spirit can inspire the heart of a country music writer, a Polka enthusiast, a rock-n-roller, or even a hip-hop artist.

Love for God expressed through any number of mediums is pleasing to God when it is prompted by His Holy Spirit.

V. 19 seems to specifically state that we should speak to one another with music. Where is Paul going with this? It sounds an awful lot like he wants our lives to be a Musical! One of the first things that this makes me think of is the recent *Les Mis* movie. It's a pretty unique musical because there's a scene where Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe are singing to each other. It's hard for a guy like me not to think of it as *X-Men's Wolverine* singing with the *Gladiator*.



Well, I'm pretty sure this is not what the Apostle Paul had in mind. In Luke 6:45b Jesus teaches us that, "...the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." This is just as true for singing. The more our hearts are filled with songs of praise and worship, the more our speech toward each other will reflect God honoring words. Colossians 3:16 summarizes it so well, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." So, in our corporate worship but also in our conversations with one another, let's not hesitate to let the words from our favorite worship songs become part of our vocabulary. Without coming across as silly or cliché, let's embrace the language of worship as one way that we can build each other up and teach and admonish one another.

V. 19 says to "sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." But, should the music be more traditional or more contemporary? This can be a touchy subject in the Church at large today. Worship Wars have not helped build up or unify us as Christians. There are some pretty strong feelings and opinions out there about which music is truly worshipful. The fact is, music is just one way that we worship God. Any time that we ascribe value and reverence to God, we are worshipping Him. However, singing is one of the primary ways we express our worship corporately as a Grace Community. There is a wonderful variety of styles, instruments, and voices that make music a

⁷ *NIV Study Bible* 2011, p. 1992, note on v. 19.

⁸ This just means they are Spirit-inspired or prompted by the Holy Spirit.

beautiful offering of praise to God. We are blessed to have our worship people get along at our church.

But, as humans, we have some pretty particular preferences for music. Overall, we each probably feel that our particular approach is one of the best. And here's why I think that is: Have you ever seen a movie or heard a story where a young man is trying to woo the young woman he's become enamored with? Perhaps you've seen one of the many Romantic Comedies like Hitch. It seems like in almost every one of these stories, everyone else has their idea of how the guy should woo the girl. And oftentimes, the reason these movies are so funny is that the guy tries so hard to "do it the right way." Ultimately, as is often the case in real life, each couple has to find their own way to work out their relationship, to express their feelings for each other. Using someone else's slick pick-up lines or best dance moves just never comes across very smoothly. Eventually, a man and a woman just need to be genuine; speaking and acting from their own heart and in their own style.⁹



I believe worship music can be this way. Ephesians 5:19 says to "Sing and make music from YOUR heart to the Lord." Each one of us longs to genuinely connect with God. And we can only do that by being ourselves before God and telling Him we love Him in our own words and our own way. Certain music really moves our hearts toward God. And, when we long to sing to the Lord from our hearts, certain music just resonates in a more genuine way for us.

So, as a Grace Community we need to give each other that freedom. Let's recognize that when we come together corporately for worship, that there will be times that don't meet your particular preference. When hundreds of people gather to worship the Lord together, there needs to be a certain amount of compromise. Some will like the music to be more traditional or more contemporary. Some will like it louder and some quieter. And some, will want it totally quiet, with no music at all sometimes. It would be impossible for us to meet all of these preferences all of the time as a church.

So, it's vital that in a Grace Community we exercise grace in our worship services. If someone else's musical selection or style isn't your thing, understand that it may very much be blessing the person sitting across the room from you. As long as our songs are in line with God's Truth and directed to Him for His glory, there's no good reason to get upset about it. Let's just make sure that all of us sing from our hearts and to the Lord.

If you aren't experiencing this desire to sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, I'd urge you to think about that. Our text this morning urges us that this is a fairly natural part of the Christian faith. It doesn't mean that all of us have to be great singers or play an instrument. But, following Christ goes beyond the important realities of believing the right doctrine and obeying God's laws. Being filled with the Spirit results in worship; in psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit welling up from the center of our being.

A vibrant relationship with God should create in our hearts a growing desire to praise God in song. This can be a way to tell that we are walking in step with the Spirit. And, if this is lacking in our lives, it can be a helpful warning indicator that perhaps our heart has grown cold toward the Lord. Worship is more than singing, but Ephesians 5:19 shows us that it is not less. Music is a key activity for Christ-followers. Being filled with God's Spirit prompts our hearts toward songs for the Lord.

I began this message with a video game illustration reminding us that we have just one life to live. Let's live it with our hearts so filled up with worship that our lives have no room left for foolishness. No room left for wasting our time on things like drunkenness and debauchery or any other evil that surrounds us. **Let's live wisely, on mission with God, making the most of every opportunity that comes along.**

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on November 13, 2016 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.

⁹ See Proverbs 30:18-19